

GRACEL MENEU: "ISLA MUJER"

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OF CULTURE OF THE GENERALITAT VALENCIANA

CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN VALENCIA

THE RISE OF A SERIES OF GROUPS IN VALENCIA AND THEIR PROJECTION ABROAD RECEIVED AN ENORMOUS BOOST FROM "DANSA VALÈNCIA", A FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE LAUNCHED BY THE GENERALITAT VALENCIANA WITH THE INTENTION OF MAKING VALENCIA A CENTRE OF CONTEMPORANEITY AND MODERNITY.

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MAL PELO. "LA MIRADA DE BÚBAL"

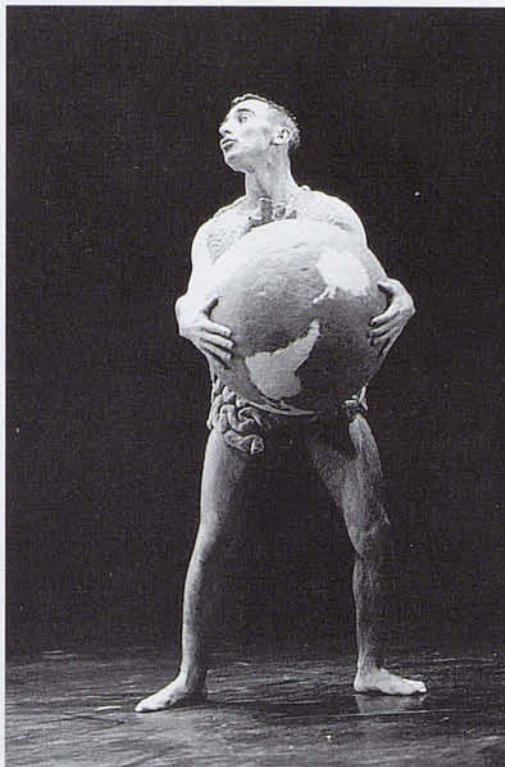
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In the mid-sixties, when the universe of possibilities of what we know as contemporary dance opened up to creators almost overnight, the city of Valencia became a point of reference of the first magnitude. Suddenly, the name of techniques such as Limón, Graham and Cunningham, or of choreographers like Pina Bausch, were no longer the reflections of an alien universe but part of the ideological and technical apparatus with which a new generation of performers appeared on the foremost stages of the Spanish State, prepared to radically overturn the dance world. In Barcelona at that time, and to give just three examples, Anna Maleras was widening her pupils' field of choreographic creation and constantly exposing them to new techniques, Cesc Gelabert arrived on the scene with his uniquely personal approach to dance and Ramon Solé was launching the Ballet Contemporani de Barcelona. Meanwhile, Valencia contributed with the work of Gerard Collins, recently arrived from Barcelona where he had formed L'Espantall, and, especially, with Vaganovos, a group led by Olga Poliakoff which could have gone a

long way but which broke up, although its urge to find a point of encounter between theatre and dance gave rise to an artistic approach which is still at the centre of many performers' work today. This period also produced Giap, a group formed by Josep Argente and Micaela Torres which was especially important from the teaching point of view. This was the basic nucleus. Soon afterwards, at the beginning of the eighties and in the midst of a constant coming and going of dancers and choreographers between Paris, New York and, especially, Barcelona, the Ananda Dansa company appeared, undoubtedly the most exciting adventure in contemporary dance in the city of Valencia and today the most consolidated. Vianats Dansa appeared in the middle of the decade and the Vicente Sáez Company towards the end.

Although in 1982 the Teatre Escalante saw the launching of *Dansa*, a production by the Ananda Dansa Ballet-Theatre Company in which the work of the Valls brother-and-sister team is already visible, the group's official presentation took place in 1984 with the key production *Destiada*. This was the start of an

artistic venture which was to last the rest of the decade and whose chief elements, as I see them, were memories, evocation, a strong narrative composition, an impressive, constantly changing scenography and, especially, "the exploration of the territory that exists between theatre and dance". Edison Valls recently wrote, "Ananda Dansa could be considered an unusual dance-theatre company in that in creating our integral performances the subject matter is a basic element of our work. If we start with the assumption that our job as artists is to be an emotional reflection of the society we live in, the choice of subject matter ought to centre on a path leading from our collective memory to the present: the Spanish Civil war, the world of bullfighting, terrorism, feminism..." The group has stuck together all these years with a stability that is unusual in the world of dance. It's now called Teatre del Ball and is made up of Edison Valls, director, Rosàngels Valls, titular choreographer, the musician Pep Llopis (whose compositions for Ananda set a style which was almost a hallmark of the group), the scenographer Carles Montesinos and an impressive array of



SOL PICÓ. "PEVE, SPECTACULAR DANCE POEMATUM"

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dancers including Rosa Ribes, Juli García, Irene Mira and Empar Fernández. Subsequent productions were joined by important names from the art world, such as Andreu Alfaro and Maria Chana, musicians like Perico Sambeat and Esperança Abad, lighting technician Eric Teunis and costumier Francis Montesinos. With the help of all of them, Ananda Dansa quickly became established and produced shows such as *Crònica civil* (V-36/39) and *Homenatge a K*, which along with *Destiada* make up what Edison Valls called *Trilogia de la violència*. Later came *Basta de danza*, in which the group took a new artistic approach which was to continue with *Borgia Imperante*, the group's most complete and ambitious show, produced on a higher budget than normal and inaugurated for Expo '92. They are now touring Spain with *Pol de gel*, a new experiment in dance for children. With few exceptions, critics and public alike have reacted with enthusiastic praise for this theatre-dance company, and the Valencian institutions, especially the Department of Culture, puts it high on its list of cultural priorities.

Vianats is another important experiment in contemporary dance from the city of Valencia. In 1984 Gracel Meneu, an excellent dancer and choreographer, came back from New York with the latest techniques. The following year, in partnership with the photographer Pedro Pablo Hernández —an essential part of the project which led Gracel's extraordinary choreographic skills to a perpetual dialogue with an audio-visual universe forming part of the stage set— Vianats made its debut in Valencia with *Vianants*. Next came *Via*, with support from various institutions, with music by Victor Nubla which according to the critic Nel Diago, "is particularly hard and produces an obsessive sensorial atmosphere over which Gracel Meneu elaborates a meticulous and fascinating choreography. The result is a performance of peculiar beauty which transmits dark, tormented experiences". Afterwards, with the dancers Mònica Estremiana and Cristina Andreu, she created *Shuei*, at a moment of some international projection and recognition, a vigorous offering in the avant-garde of contemporary dancing. From here on

(now without Pablo Hernández and with the support of the Generalitat Valenciana), Gracel Meneu started on a career which today has a good number of titles to its credit —*Pi*, *Gàrgolas*, *Isla-Mujer* and *Sangre*—, in collaboration with the young choreographer Antoni Aparici. Vicente Sáez, trained at the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona and a pupil of Cesc Gelabert, is at this moment one of the choreographers and dancers who is making a name for himself both at home and abroad. He possesses unusual talent as a dancer, and as a choreographer he has produced important shows based on an unending search for roots (*Uadi*, 1992), interior exploration (*Ens-Solos*, 1989, *Rapta*, 1990) and dialogue with colour (*Iris*, 1993). These are the three companies today based in the city of Valencia. But the short history of contemporary dance in this city would be incomplete without the work of choreographers like Antònia Andreu, Maria Muñoz and, in the nineties, Joan Bernat Pineda. Of these, the first settled in Madrid after returning from New York and founded her own company there. Nevertheless, all her



VICENTE SÁEZ, "IRIS"

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work (*El último cañí, Sé rápido, sé limpio, sé barato; Los pies en la cabeza y la cabeza en los pies; Monsieur B*) –or almost all– has been seen in Valencia, a city she has always been part of. Maria Muñoz, for her part, founded Dux in 1985 with the Mallorcan Maria Antònia Oliver, and together they presented an almost legendary production, *Corre, corre, que fem tard*. Later she joined Pep Ramis to form Mal Pelo and produce *Quarere, Sur* and *Perros del sur*. Joan Bernat Pineda, of Alzira, has divided his work between Belgium and Valencia since his 1990 debut in "Dansa València", with *Bajo el puente y con los labios doloridos*, until the present moment, when he represents some of the most advanced thinking in Spanish contemporary dance.

To all this must be added the visits of the Valencian Santiago Sampere, with the production *Ribera*, promoted by the Centre Coreogràfic de la Generalitat Valenciana. The scene is completed with the work of Micaela Torres, founder of the group Jove Ballet de València, and with a new generation led by Mar Gómez, Juan Castelblanque and

the group Okrana Dansa. Okrana Dansa is the outcome of the Centre Coreogràfic which the Generalitat's Centre Dramàtic promoted for two years with essentially educational objectives and under the direction of Rosàngels Valls.

But the rise of these initiatives and the success of these groups at home and abroad was due largely to "Dansa València", a festival of contemporary Spanish dance launched by the Generalitat Valenciana at a moment when those responsible for cultural affairs in our country felt a special interest in making Valencia a centre of contemporaneity and modernity. The "Dansa València" festival, in some measure the heir to a tradition established in 1982 with the "Jornades de dansa" organised by the Teatre Principal and the Teatre Escalante, was conceived as a marketplace open to the most influential contemporary dance impresarios, who, more than in any other field of art, hold the key to the future. It soon became a forum for debate on the state of choreographers and dancers, both from the artistic point of view and from the

organisational and economic side. With "Dansa València", the city became a must for outsiders and a treasury of possibilities for local spectators. "Dansa València" has seen important companies like Lanónima Imperial, Cesc Gelabert and Metros; it has presented excellent experimental work like that of Marga Guergué, Tomeu Vergés and Javier de Frutos; it has helped to establish companies like Díez i Díez. Above all, "Dansa València" saw the presentation of Joan Bernat Pineda's *Mecànica Quàntica*, which you might say is his own personal "theory of dance". Almost all of Vicente Sáez's shows have had their debut there, and the same goes for Gracel Meneu, Ananda Dansa and Antònia Andreu. Santiago Sampere has come over from France to present some of his most important productions, *Quijote* and *Ribera*. Not to mention Jesús Hidalgo, who at present directs his own company in Caen (France) and has presented his latest work in Spain; Mal Pelo, who were the sensation of the 1990 edition, and Mar Gómez, who burst onto the scene in 1994 with her show *La Matanja de Tezas*. ■